



# S. Plainfield begins cleanup of 'ooze' at park

## Heavily tainted site to reopen in 2 months

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A year after a local environmentalist discovered "black ooze" in a South Plainfield park, workers have begun removing dirt that is contaminated with PCBs, arsenic and asbestos.

Wet weather has delayed work at Veterans Memorial Park, but crews expect to complete the removal of illegally dumped items and contaminated soil this fall, Borough Administrator Vincent Buttiglieri said yesterday.

"In 60 days, our park will be reopened, our children will be back playing," Mayor Dan Gallagher said after the borough got \$250,000 from

the state Department of Environmental Protection last month.

The state grant will cover only part of the borough's \$989,000 contract with Clean Earth Environmental Services of Winslow. The borough is bonding for the rest, but the infusion of state aid came faster than usual, local officials said.

Assemblyman Patrick Diegnan (D-18th Dist.), a local resident, said he felt a personal stake in getting the funds approved, because "the best days of my youth were spent playing in" the park.

Diegnan and Gallagher were vacationing last year when Bob Spiegel of the Edison Wetlands Association called them to report finding a

black, tarlike substance oozing from the ground in the park. The substance has not been identified.

The wetlands association has been particularly concerned about the area because contamination from the old Cornell-Dubilier plant complex already has found its way into waterways, as well as some nearby homes. The intensely polluted plant site, now an industrial park, is only a few hundred yards from the park.

While examining the park, the state Department of Environmental Protection also found PCBs and asbestos shingles, said Commissioner Bradley Campbell. The agency is still investigating the sources of the different contamination, he said.

"It appears that the shingles were just dumped," Campbell said. "We're not sure about the others."

Used as a coolant in electrical equipment, PCBs have been linked to cancer and developmental disabilities. Cornell-Dubilier, a former electronics plant, has the highest concentrations of PCBs of any site in New Jersey, according to state and federal environmental officials.

While PCBs usually are immobile in soil, those at Cornell-Dubilier have been dissolved by other chemicals dumped there and are pervasive in soil, groundwater and dust.

The contaminated soil will be hauled to a hazardous waste disposal facility. Once the dirt is removed, engineers will retest the remaining soil to determine whether

more needs to be removed. Clean fill will be brought in to replace the soil.

Kamaily Nichols, program director for the watershed association, applauded the park cleanup. But she called on the DEP to investigate further in the vicinity.

"One outstanding issue is the surrounding low-lying wetlands ... which receive run-off from Cornell-Dubilier," Nichols said.

The contaminated areas of the park have been fenced off and playground equipment moved to other locations, Gallagher said. But playing fields normally are heavily used for baseball, softball, soccer and other sports, he said.

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